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Muslim Organisations: Muslims in multicultural Britain?

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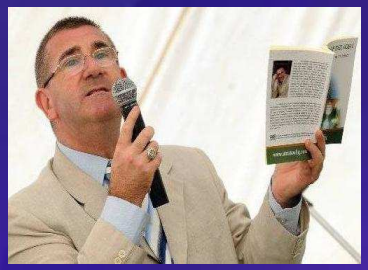

Muslim Organisations: Muslims in multicultural Britain?

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Our Common Future: Religion and Values

'Faith, identity, difference, cultural and Political imaginings: Reflections from the field'

"Muslims communities have emerged in the late twentieth century Britain and have articulated their needs in the context of external factors and constraints. Consequently new organisations emerged at a local and national levels who had specific social, cultural and political concerns. Their priority was to represent Muslim issues to national institutions to the British state, and to persuade the state to accommodate aspects if personal morality and codes of behaviour, type of education and forms of religious and cultural identification." (Ansari 2004: 340)

Why the study into Muslim Organisations

- How and why particular Muslim organisations were consulted by the Government post 9/11 and more recent attacks
- Activism of work, charity, interfaith, political realm
- Understanding the perspectives of Muslims working within Muslim organisations
- Concern about the misrepresentation of the views expressed by organisations and their frustrations in trying to express their accounts

Outline of this presentation

- Selection of this research subject
- Research questions
- Repositioning research
- Epistemological stance
- Methodology
- Method of data collection
- Stages of writing up: chapter dissemination
- Significant findings
- Analysis: members, leaders and stakeholders of Muslim organisations in Britain
- Some tentative conclusions
- Concluding remarks…

Selection of this research subject

- Muslims in Britain have been the focus of study in recent years post tragedies such as 9/11, 7/7 little is known on mainstream Muslim organisations who engage with local and national bodies
- How and why they mobilise religiously and politically (tend to seen separate to one an Islamic perspective, overlaps)
- Little is known of Muslim organisations and their impact on local and national spheres
- Investigate the perceptions of stakeholders, leaders and member of Muslim organisations

Research questions

- Muslims in multicultural Britain: religious and political organisation (of Muslim 'communities') in British civil society.
- "Muslim communities in Britain: Isolated or isolationists?"
- How have Muslims in society and through Muslim organisations construct their Britis[redacted] hybrid identity which intermingles religion, cul[redacted] politics?
- Muslim organisations and the emerging phenemona of activism in this religious group: a study of Muslims in Britain working in Muslim oganisations

Research Questions

- In what ways do religious beliefs shape organisational strategies and decisions made by Muslim leaders contributing towards larger society?
- How do Muslims within organisations interact with other non Muslim organisations and the Government?
- How do members of Muslim organisations interact with other Muslim organisations, networks and members?

Research aims

- To explore the nature and history of Muslims organisations in Britain
- To understand the challenges of Muslims working within these organisations

Repositioning research

- Investigate the political organisation of 'communities' in civil society'
- Keane 'a totality of voluntary civic, social and institutions that form the basis of functioning society as opposed to the force-back structures of a state' (regardless of that state's political system) (Keane 1988: 23)

Some existing Knowledge: The historical to the present

- Migration and settlement
- Recent historical events
- Media representations
- Educational and future co

Changing experiences and ways of understanding the presence of Muslims in Britain

- Globalisation, migration
- Mixed empirical and theoretical explanations
- Modood (2000) – negotiating hybrid identities
- Understanding Muslim organisations perspective

Epistemological stance

- Interpretivist: stresses on the understanding of social world through an examination of the interpretation (McIntyre 2002)
- Data collection process derives interpretations of Muslims working within [illegible] organisations to help define an understanding of the social world through social actors hence relating towards an interpretavist epistemology (Lincoln and Denzin 2000)

Methodology

- Qualitative research technique: tend to be concerned with data derived form social actors that will help to determine a theory which will emerge from the research (Burgess 1994)

- Harvey (1993) illustrates the three basic types of methodological triangulation, one [illegible] relevant to my fieldwork and data collection [illegible] one researcher using two or more research techniques,' through this method I have collected different types of primary and secondary sources, for example first hand interviews, journals, released documents and leaflets from the varying organisations.

Method of data collection

- Observation/participation
- Collection of documents – reports, papers, newspapers, magazines, leaflets
- Texts (published/unpublished)
- Semi structured interviews – note taking during this process
- Television and radio (the discourse [illegible] field)
- Internet
- Overt Observations/note taking at events held by organisations also at seminars/conferences/lectures/debates

Analysis: respondents perceptions

- 40 interviews with respondents from varying organisations (male and female) 30 formal interviews and 10 informal interviews
- Interested in the perceptions of stakeholders how they perceive British society and multiculturalism
- Researching approximately 8-10 national Muslim organisations
- Collecting publications/discourse [illegible] fieldwork
- Link data back to theory on Identity (Hall, Jenkins) Identity formation
- Ramji 2005: Muslim men study – distinction between migrant generation and second generation Muslims in Britain perception of retaining Islamic identity over cultural identity from place of origin

Stages of writing up

Transcribed all the interviews

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Categorised data through the use of computer package NVIVO

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Through this defined various themes which emerge from the data

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From this began to organise relevant and closely associated data

Experiences of Muslim leaders, stakeholders and members within organisations

Significant findings 1: British Muslim 'identities'

- Muslim identities
- Description of a 'good' Muslim
- Notion of Britishness
- British national identity

Exploring the difference of identities within Muslim stakeholders, leaders and members Of organisations within this there are layers of Interpretations.

Muslim identities

I would describes Muslim identity as patchwork quilt (.) this person goes to that mosque such as Barelwi, Salafi, Deobandi (.) you cant keep anyone happy I think its our fault (.) we have major ego trappings and sectarian divides you wont go to that mosque because that other mosque [illegible] image and particular Muslim identity (.) problem is trying to keep everyone happy so the Deobandis are mainly Pakistani and also Guajarati's who run the organisation and have generational differences within them yet they are all common in the identity of the '*Shahahada*' (Leader from a National Muslim organisation)

Muslim identities cont'd

- …well the danger is seeing all the (.) whole Muslim community as one in terms of its identity there are different issues which are fundamental to the Muslims community it is their unity and identity in terms of their community…so Muslims tend to unite around the identity of being [illegible] brings them together and subsequently after that things start to become slightly more complex (Executive member of a Muslim Organisation)

Description of a good Muslim

- It is important to understand that Islam helps to shape a person and doing good things are innately within us and are from Allah (.) as Muslims we follow the way of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and have 'taqwa' (.) you know God consciousness….Islam encourages us to engage with [redacted] non Muslim and help each other out (.) [redacted] provides a framework a set of guiding principles and this helps us to become better individuals, better Muslims, even those Muslims who don't pray have an affiliation to Islam which makes them strive for good (Chairman of national Muslim organisation)

Notion of Britishness

- Within Britishness we are celebrating what it has achieved and what it stands for (.) you know like the structures of the country (.) knowing the differences of the country (.) like I am a west midlander from Leicester the greatest city of the world ok not perfect but we try in the city and Muslim organisations try to get the best of both worlds (.) like liberty, equality are the rules of law in Islam and for Muslims and this is just the whole British etiquette also…we are trying to get the best of both and being proud of both so we are British and Muslim (Chairman of local and national Muslim organisation)

Critique of Britishness

- Muslim communities in a way feel 'British' but are not recognised for this (.) in a way we feel a sense of duty as being grateful to Britain for hosting our community and giving us the space and opportunity to live and work in this country and set up our organisations so we are given the opportunity by the majority yet as a minority we are on[illegible] we relate to the idea of Britishness we are not regarded or seen to be British we are treated differently (.) this term relat[illegible] to one set of people and is only related to them (.) white British people who are originally from here (Community leader in national Muslim organisation)

British national identity

- …when I come back from Yemen I feel yes I am back in Britain (.) you just know that home is here there is a certain level of fairness practiced here in which we get to express ourselves freely more than even in 'Muslim' countries (.) we can branch out within our organisational work to help [illegible] terms of career wise we can excel (.) not only this we can express our beliefs freely and also share it with others there are many benefits of living in Britain and I feel happy in recognising myself as British… (Executive member of a Muslim organisation)

British national identity cont'd

- I think (.) that British national identity isn't something unique or something which we can say is one thing (.) it is a collection (.) I mean (.) I think it means different things to different people (.) and er fundamentally the core values consist of respect and valuing the wider British society (Media spokesperson for national Muslim organisation)

British national identity cont'd

- I think us as (.) Muslim communities feel very British (.) in a way we are grateful to the host community we are given space and opportunity to live and work in this country by the majority yes we are the minority and are on the fringes because of this (Muslim leader from prominent Muslim organisation)

Significant findings 2: Islamophobia

- Definition of Islamophobia
- Islamophobia: relationship with Muslim organisations
- Members, leaders and stak[illegible] perspective on Islamophobia

Defining Islamophobia

- *In recent years a new word has gained currency…'Islamophobia.' It is a useful way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims. Such dread and [redacted] in western countries and cultures for several centuries. In the last twenty years, however the dislike has become more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous (Seddon 2004: 156).*

Islamophobia: relationship with Muslim organisations

- we are attacked on accordance to our faith urm (.) when people see me they see me as Pakistani so its racial then anything but I mean you can see it about recent things say Nick Griffin and the BNP party where he is now openly attacking Islam and its culture (.) before it used to be the Pakistani society but now he is openly attacking Islam so I think it does exist and he is trying to encourage it aswell so I think it definitely exists (Respondent 19, member of a Muslim organisation).

Islamophobia: Muslim organisations cont'd

- we experience a lot of negativity from mainstream society (.) we are always portrayed and seen as the enemy even within ourselves there is a lot of conflict and divides you (.) have those following say a *Salafi* tradition on one side and thos[illegible] perspective (.) these differences sometimes creates conflict and makes it difficult to get people to unite and work for the sake of Allah (Respondent 6, member of a Muslim organisation)

Significant findings 3: Muslims and the politics of Multiculturalism

- Political discourse of Multiculturalism
- Impact of 9/11, 7/7 and Glasgow bomb attacks on Muslim organisations in Britain
- Identity politics
- The notion of belonging and c

Discourse of social cohesion and Integrationist language used by respondents

Political discourse of multiculturalism

- …we have working groups with the Government which we try and discuss the most recent issues (.) like the radicalisation of Muslims on campus (.) in this we get asked (.) define radical or (.) define extreme (.) our opinions are asked on broad terms to see if they match with the Government (.) when it comes to multiculturalism we explain to them that Muslims are isolating themselves cause the Government and the media (.) who are hugely to blame in this…they [illegible] and suspicion of general mainstream Muslims (.) and we (.) are accused of not integrating much but the agendas of the Government don't work in favour of a multicultural society (.) they speak to us (.) we speak to our members (.) but its like preaching to the converted (.) the real issues on the ground are not being looked at (.)

(Respondent 29, Leader of national Muslim organisation)

Impact of 9/11, 7/7 and Glasgow bomb attacks on Muslim organisations in Britain

- ….in terms of issues we held a lot of events especially after 7/7 and 9/11 and did things like (.) ask a Muslim session (.) which are specifically designed for non Muslims to come and ask any questions they may have and there was one we recently held after Jack straw made all those comments about the veil (.) these events are quite popular and a lot of people attend (.) and ask lots of differ… ourselves open to people to ask (.) whatever they want… ourselves (.) open to people so they feel free to ask (.) we are just trying to break down barriers (.) people might have concerns in their minds but (.) they don't really know who to go to (.) and who to ask I think these sessions help and we try and speak to them (.) to try and give the a clear view (.) on our beliefs and practices (.) it needs to be addressed to give people a chance to ask questions (.)

(Respondent 24, member of a Muslim organisation)

Identity politics

- …there is strength in identities by the way that British society deals with them (.) we have people from different cultures (.) multiculturalism can be seen in society as giving space for cultural backgrounds (.) recently aspects of Muslim culture has been brought into multiculturalism debate (.) we are all entrenched in certain positions and share common identities (.) and there is justification for that [redacted] used to unite with other with the same [redacted] because (.) the dominant culture is overwhelming and does not always listen to a fragmented minority group (.) but my identity as a leader of a British Muslim organisation is to serve the community (.) not just Muslim but the whole of the community….

(Respondent 22, member of a Muslim organisation)

The notion of belonging and community

…we are not going to get anywhere to be honest there are white/Pakistani/black people living together live side by side (.) just living in their own spaces but theres too many economic factors housing, schooling and sometimes not that much effort is put to lift people up (.) people have problems (.) inner city schools no emphasis was put in investing in the local community to engage with on[redacted] welcome and embrace what they [redacted] own cultures or what they relate to but when their [redacted] will go on about their own identity that didn't deal with socio economic concerns of society (.) this has had a massive force the different communities just don't engage (.) don't mix

(Respondent 20, member of Muslim organisation)

The notion of belonging and community cont'd

- a British born subject son immigrant worker speak Guajarati language celebrating and value ability and knowing where you stand respecting other people and finding out what it means to be British (.) multiculturalism is too much of a loose term but we are all different we vary in our background (.) your different but vary at the same time Notting hill carnival (.) Chinese take away (.) are great!! M[redacted] Asian people these things never brought [redacted] in the world of work and education no emphasis to try and work together (.) with each other those who lose their identity are told and to become like the majority (.) people should really be positive about what you stand for and vice versa

(Respondent 16, member of Muslim organisation)

The Research Experience: Islamic etiquettes and accessing sensitive groups

- Trust is gained through attitudes and behaviour rather than credentials
- Recognising researcher – parti
- Researcher reputation
- ‘What’s in it for us?’
- Perspectives of trust

Researcher

- My experiences as a researcher working through these issues have reinforced my belief that in my personal and professional life identity matters. What must be made evident to all researchers, irrespective of ethnic origin, are tensions associated with researching across differences and through apparent similarity of gender, ethnicity, religious and educational and social status. These [redacted] managed in any study (Higginbottom [redacted] 2005: 667).

Theoretical and ontological considerations I

- Identity constructions (Hall and Jenkins 2000)
- Epistemology of the research:
- Interpretavist theory: stresses on the understanding of social world through an examination of the interpretation (McIntyre 2002)
- Data collection process derives interpretations [illegible] working with specific organisations to help define and understanding of the social world through social actors

Theoretical and ontological considerations II

- Theory of existence (Marx, 1859, in Hollis, 1994)
- Hermeneutic theory

An actor means something by acting in a particular way because there is a conscious stock of meaning to draw upon (Hollis, 1994)

- Human life and the social world are unde
outside the social world. In order to understand why they a
certain things, theoretical frameworks get nearer and closer to understand
and insight within which people are involved and why.

Concluding remarks...

- The method of interviews and then followed by triangulation was undertaken with the intention of gaining insightful accounts of Muslim leaders and members within Muslim organisations within the context of Britain. The research data gained is analysed in an attempt to focus upon Muslims in multicultural Britain and the themes and perspectives emerging through the analysis.

- Political identities: how these are reinforced and have emerged due to a higher level of activism within Muslim organisations

- Redefining a new rhetoric in social and political trajectories

- I specifically opted to use qualitative research methods in order to be sensitive to the nature of human and cultural social contexts that is commonly guided by the ethics to remain loyal or true to the phenomena under study, rather than to any particular set of methodological principles (Lincoln 1998: 290).

What do you think?

- Anthropology
- Experiences
- Theories

Any further comments or questions….

Please contact me!

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- **Thank you for taking the time to listening to this presentation.**

Questions:

- Do you think that Muslim organizations play a major role in mainstream British society?
- What do you see as the role of Muslims in Britain today?
- How does one perceive Muslims political identity?